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ABSTRACT

Studies of child-rearing practices have consistently shown that the degree of physical punishment used by parents is positively correlated with various forms of psychopathology and negatively related to conscience development. One explanation of these findings has to do with modeling; the child learns by example that aggressiveness toward those of lesser power is permissible. Many educators maintain that judicious occasional use of corporal punishment is beneficial to the child. While resulting in immediate decrements in the undesired behavior, however, occasional punishment actually strengthens the behavior by allowing it to be intermittently reinforced. Unfortunately, many educators are apparently unaware that effective and more humane alternatives exist. A list of techniques for maintaining discipline without physical punishment was prepared by the National Education Association Task Force on Corporal Punishment. From the limited amount of research on the popularity of physical punishment, it appears that approximately 55-65 percent of school officials, but only one-third of parents, feel that it is an effective technique. (Author/JG)

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Some Myths Regarding the Use of Corporal Punishment in the Schools

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This paper will explore four of the most common myths surrounding the use of corporal punishment in the schools. It will also attempt to provide alternatives to the use of corporal punishment as well as provide a model law prohibiting the use of physical punishment in the schools.

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Myth 1. Physical punishment is a "tried and true" method. It is good for students. It helps them develop a sense of personal responsibility, learn self-discipline and develop moral character.

Studies of child-rearing practices, while admittedly not free from ambiguity and methodological problems, have consistently yielded a similar finding. As a general rule, the degree of physical punishment used by the parent is positively correlated with various forms of psychopathology, particularly delinquency and acting-out behavior (Feshbach and Feshbach, 1973). The very high recidivism rate of delinquents also indicates that punishment does little if anything to improve one's sense of personal responsibility. More recent work, in fact, indicates a near perfect correlation between the amount and severity of physical punishment suffered by a child from 2 to 12 and the amount and severity of antisocial aggressiveness that he displays during adolescence (Buttons, 1973; Welsh, 1974). There is surprisingly little evidence of inhibitory effects even when the punishment has been specifically directed toward aggressive infractions (Feshbach, 1973).

Another consistent finding is that physical punishment is negatively related to strength of conscience whereas love-oriented techniques (praise, warmth, and reasoning) are positively related to conscience development (Hoffman, 1970; Sears, et al., 1957). The consistency of these two findings is especially impressive in light of the diversity of procedures, measures, and population used by different investigators.

That moral development is related to the use of physical punishment is not surprising in that physical punishment often represents or is perceived as representing a form of retaliation--a low level form of moral development (comparable to what would be regarded in Kohlberg's system as Stage One whereby might is right and one behaves out of fear). The harsh tone of the teacher's voice along with

other available cues at the time belies any gesture of good will on the educator's part or any genuine regret that he has over the occurrence of the incident. The teacher's anger and willingness to retaliate, readily convey an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth philosophy. Because physical punishment is usually based as much or more on the teacher's needs than on the child's needs, it appears to be used more for purposes of retaliation than for education. Even on those occasions where the educator has the child's best interests at heart, the child is apt to see the physical punishment as arbitrary since it usually does not relate to the misbehavior (for example, being hit for coming in late from recess). If reasoning is to be used as a means of facilitating conscience development, then the child must be able to see a relationship between the physical punishment and his own behavior. To physically punish without a cognitive rationale not only offends the child's sense of justice but leads to inappropriate generalization and the absence of guidelines for novel and ambiguous situations (Feshbach and Feshbach, 1973). Yet it is very difficult for people to respond to physical punishment in a cool, analytic, rational manner. For physical punishment often results in an upsurge of anger which precludes a rational distinction between the real causes of his predicament and the outcomes of his predicament. It is extremely difficult for a child (particularly for the behaviorally disordered child), to be logical in the heat of the moment. Psychologic--not logic--dictates the child's reactions.

One explanation as to why physical punishment increases aggressiveness but fails to promote good internal controls has to do with modeling. By punishing the child, the educator unwittingly provides a clear-cut model of the very kind of behavior from which he wants the student to refrain. What the child learns from the educator's example is that it is permissible to aggress toward those of lesser power, status and prestige. The combined findings of laboratory

experiments, controlled field studies, and correlational studies provide substantial testimony that observing violence tends to foster aggressiveness (Bandura, 1973). In essence, we are telling the child that physical force is an acceptable way of resolving conflict--that it is all right to physically attack others when angry. Aggression begets aggression.

In brief, it seems clear that corporal punishment does not promote self-discipline. Once the authoritarian controls are gone, the child can once again do as he pleases.

Myth 2. Occasional paddling contributes substantially to the child's socialization.

While the dangers associated with the use of physical punishment over extended periods of time may be readily apparent, some educators maintain that the infrequent or what might sometimes be referred to as the judicious use of corporal punishment is beneficial to the child. At first blush, this suggestion seems to have merit. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes evident that the occasional use of physical punishment whether "judicious" or not actually works to the child's and to the teacher's disadvantage. While resulting in immediate decrements in the undesired behavior, occasional punishment does not produce lasting changes. To be effective in suppressing behavior, punishment unless traumatic in nature must be applied consistently, particularly in the case of aggressors with few social skills. Yet in applied settings, the behavior to be eliminated is rarely punished each time it occurs because constant surveillance is prohibitive. This state of affairs leads to a situation in which the undesired behavior is intermittently reinforced. And, as you know, intermittent reinforcement results in increased response persistence. Thus, instead of weakening the undesired behavior, occasional punishment actually strengthens the behavior by allowing it to be reinforced on an intermittent schedule.

Myth 3. Corporal punishment is the only recourse in maintaining order. It is the only thing some kids understand. Alternatives to physical punishment are neither available nor realistic.

To say that corporal punishment is the only thing that some kids understand means only that some kids have not been exposed to other, more constructive forms of discipline (NEA, 1972). We must offer then another kind of example to follow other than corporal punishment. Exposing such children to more of the same kind of (corporal) punishment will certainly do nothing constructive relative to teaching them new ways of behaving. Sadly, just as physical punishment may be the only thing that some kids understand, it appears that physical punishment may be the only thing that some teachers understand.

In school systems that prohibit the use of corporal punishment, both teachers and students survive nicely without it. It is unfortunate that many educators are apparently unaware that effective and more humane alternatives do exist and are already in use to some degree. This lack of awareness is partly attributable to a simple lack of information regarding the availability of effective, humane approaches such as contracting and self-management. In part, however, the use of physical punishment discourages the educator from seeking the use of more constructive forms of school discipline. The teacher becomes accustomed to living with short-lived restraints, accompanied perhaps by a release of his own pent-up frustrations, instead of searching for ways to encourage acceptable behavior. Because physical punishment will often serve as a temporary inhibitor, the teacher is tricked into believing that he has struck upon an effective technique. Once they are convinced that punishment "works" there is a danger that what is considered "a last resort" will become the first method applied in future conflicts with students when one is angry. Discovering positive approaches requires more thought and ingenuity than a spanking requires and overworked educators are understandably tempted,

particularly when they are angry, to follow the path of least resistance.

The following list of techniques for maintaining discipline without inflicting physical pain on students was prepared by the NEA Task Force on Corporal Punishment (NEA, 1972).

Short-Range Solutions

1. Quiet places (corners, small rooms, retreats)
2. Student-teacher agreement on immediate alternatives
3. Teaming of adults--teachers, administrators, aides, volunteers (parents and others)--to take students aside when they are disruptive and listen to them, talk to them, and counsel them until periods of instability subside
4. Similar services for educators whose stamina is exhausted
5. Social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists to work on a one-to-one basis with disruptive students or distraught teachers
6. Provision of alternate experiences for students who are bored, turned off, or otherwise unreceptive to particular educational experiences:
   a. independent projects
   b. listening and viewing experiences with technological learning devices
   c. library research
   d. work-study experience
7. In-service programs to help teachers and other school staff learn a variety of techniques for building better interpersonal relations between themselves and students and among students:
   a. Class meetings (Glasser technique)
   b. Role playing
   c. Case study--what would you do?
   d. Student-teacher human relations retreats and outings
   e. Teacher (or other staff)--student-parent conferences
8. Class discussion--of natural consequences of good and bad behavior (not threats or promises); of what behavior is right; of what behavior achieves desired results; of causes of a "bad day" for the class
9. Privileges to bestow or withdraw
10. Approval or disapproval
11. Other staff members to work with a class whose teacher needs a break.

Intermediate-Range Solutions

1. Staff - student jointly developed discipline policy and procedures
2. Staff - student committee to implement discipline policy
3. Parent education programs in interpersonal relations
4. Staff in-service program on interpersonal relations, on understanding emotions, and on dealing with children when they are disruptive
5. Student human relations councils and grievance procedures
6. Training for students and teachers in crisis intervention
7. Training for students in student advocacy
8. Training for teachers in dealing with fear of physical violence
9. Regular opportunities for principals to experience classroom situation.

Long-Range Solutions in Schools

1. Full involvement of students in the decision-making process in the school
2. Curriculum content revision and expansion by students and staff to motivate student interest
3. Teacher in-service programs on new teaching strategies to maintain student interest
4. Alternate programs for students
5. Work-study programs
6. Drop-out--drop -back-in programs
7. Alternative schools within the public school system
8. Early entrance to college
9. Alternatives to formal program during last two years of high school
10. Few enough students per staff member that staff can really get to know students
11. Adequate professional specialists - psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers
12. Aides and technicians to carry out paraprofessional, clerical, and technical duties so that professional staff are free to work directly with students more of the time
13. A wide variety of learning materials and technological devices

Long-Range Solutions With Other Agencies

1. Staff help from local and regional mental health and human relations agencies
2. More consultant staff to work with individual problem students
3. Long-range intensive in-service programs to prepare all staff to become counselors
4. Mass media presentations directed to both the public and the profession on the place of children in contemporary American society
5. Some educational experiences relocated in business, industry, and social agencies
6. Increased human relations training in preservice teacher education and specific preparation in constructive disciplinary procedures.

Myth 1. Those involved with schools favor the use of corporal punishment.

Although there has been only a limited amount of research on how popular physical punishment is, it appears that approximately 55-65% of school officials see it as effective and favor its use (Patterson, 1974). Only a third of parents feel that it is an effective technique. Students, like parents, also do not view physical punishment as an effective way to make students behave in school with opposition to corporal punishment being particularly noticeable among senior high students. Thus, school officials who permit the use of physical punishment should be aware that this strategy is not a popular one among either students or parents.

The small segment of students who do accept or favor corporal punishment as a means of correcting behavior may do so for a number of reasons, none of which are healthy. Some may simply accept it as a desirable way to handle conflict situations. Others may see it as an easy way out of trouble in that it does not take much of their time nor does it require them to change their behavior. For others, it is a good way to demonstrate their masculinity, toughness and endurance. For those motivated by excessive or neurotic guilt, it offers a quick sense of relief, thereby reducing the motivation to modify one's behavior. For the manipulative student, it becomes a way to expose the evils of authority, to polarize students and to justify

their own behavior. Supporting the cause of any of the above purposes is educationally indefensible.

As for those parents who instruct schools to use physical force to bring about desired behavior in their children, we must remember this that the physical type of discipline used at home has already produced a child who misbehaves at school. Can anyone seriously believe that following in the footsteps of an unsuccessful parent is a suitable model for professional educators? Rather than following the faulty example provided by unsuccessful parents, educators should provide an acceptable example for misguided parents to follow.

Allow me to close this address on a constructive note by quoting the law proposed by the NEA Task Force which outlaws the use of corporal punishment in the schools.

No person employed or engaged by any educational system within this state, whether public or private, shall inflict or cause to be inflicted corporal punishment or bodily pain upon a pupil attending any school or institution within such education system; provided, however, that any such person may, within the scope of his employment, use and apply such amounts of physical restraint as may be reasonable and necessary:

1) to protect himself, the pupil or others from physical injury;

2) to obtain possession of a weapon or other dangerous object upon the person or within the control of a pupil;

3) to protect property from serious harm;

and such physical restraint shall not be construed to constitute corporal punishment or bodily pain within the meaning and intendment of this section. Every resolution, bylaw, rule, ordinance, or other act or authority permitting or authorizing corporal punishment or bodily pain to be inflicted upon a pupil attending a school or educational institution should be void (NEA, 1972).

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